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THE DETROIT EXPERIMENT

Precedents for the Poor

AN INTERVIEW WITH MITCHELL SVIRIDOFF

"nobody wants welfare!"

communities in ACTION

a periodical account of the War on Poverty, is published by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

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Cover Photo: Head Start in Tennessee by the late Vytas Valaitis

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"SORRY, WRONG NUMBER"

Communication and the Poor

The candidate in an election of a Community Action Board knocks on the door. As soon as the door opens she begins her pitch—"you ought to be interested . . . this is something different . . . you have a real interest in being represented. . ." Then, just before the door is slammed in her face, the potential voter she tried to interest waves a welfare department envelope with an election notice enclosed: "Are they going to cut off my check next month if I don't vote for you?"

In a metropolitan neighborhood, a survey shows that 80 percent of the residents don't know where a neighborhood center is located. It has been operating a block or two away for over six months.

In a small mid-western city, a Community Action agency official shakes his head at a handful of people who turned out for a meeting designed to explain the new War on Poverty program. "I don't understand it. Both papers carried an announcement of the meetings." And a block worker replied, "Who reads the paper?"

By and large, when it comes to any kind of mass communication with the people we exist to work with, War on Poverty programs get a "sorry, wrong number."

It should not be a surprise, nor should it be a cause for embarrassment or alarm. This situation, recently emerging into sharper focus, really underlines the completely different character of Community Action. Obviously, one of the reasons that more traditional approaches have failed to be completely effective is this very communication gap. And by now it should be equally obvious that to a startling degree, a meaningful "participation of the groups and areas to be served" will be measured by our success in closing that gap.

Just as Head Start has triggered a whole new concept of pre-school education and Job Corps has revealed a vast potential for skilled people by-passed by traditional education structures, so too, Community Action must evolve new techniques of communication. The vast available expertise in mass communication or public relations has developed largely as a result of market studies, audience surveys and readership polls. But the people with whom we are concerned have been largely ignored as a market and thus little has been done professionally to research effective communications with them.

In certain areas, some publications, some stations have a segment of this specialized audience. They tend to be selective about the material they use; they are, understandably, as specialized in editorial judgment as in audience.

The burden is on the peddler. The Community Action agency which wants exposure for its message in such media cannot expect response with a carbon of the same release that goes to the daily paper or the promo the network radio station uses to qualify for its FCC public service record.

Foreign language newspapers — though they will usually do their own translation from English — want specifics. They want stories that have a special interest to their readership. To get their response,

we have to know their audience, take the time to get familiar with their interests, learn what they feature. And, in many areas, that's a job which can be tedious and time-consuming; but worth the effort.

The same is true for radio stations. Since the resurgence of radio after the TV-induced doldrums of the '50's, many radio stations have built highly specialized, loyal audiences based on limited but specific programming. Again, standard market data lags behind. To give them the kind of material they find usable requires local study, research and a substantial rewriting of the standard radio handout.

In the same fashion, the rural weekly, small in circulation, and the farm-oriented radio station, with a low rating, often hold sway over an intensely loyal audience. To a surprising extent, their audiences overlap the ones we're missing.

As a result, the one-release-reaches-all-media mentality has to be abandoned. To do our job well, we have to match message to media in a method as sophisticated, in its own way, as the most highly specialized scientific agency.

Conventional media don't work. The plain fact is that this large part of the American population does not read the papers avidly, follow the news on TV or get pre-digested opinions from weekly news magazines. Instead, insulated by a whole complex of educational and environmental factors which we are in business to change, their information comes from far more direct and personal sources.

Many of the members of our audience have come to trust the information they get from neighborhood personalities as far more reliable than the press. The friendly neighborhood bartender or familiar laundromat operator frequently have much greater credibility than the most pretigious reporter or knowledgeable commentator.

While the more successful "practitioners" in the business of mass communications have become habitually dedicated to reaching thousands of people through relatively few outlets, the most successful Community Action agencies will become adept at reaching fewer people through many more outlets. The adaptation, painful as it may be, must be on our part, not on the part of our audience.

To the degree we can get information about our neighborhood centers and our programs into those channels of communication, we will have participation. It will inevitably be a process of experimentation; it will demand imagination and innovation on the part of Community Action directors and information specialists. It involves getting closer to the neighborhood, depending far more on the "non-professionals" in this "profession" and paying a great deal more attention to the laundromat than the library.

Many Community Action agencies have already developed promising techniques involving such varied operations as periodic meetings with bartenders, gospel singers in flat-bed trucks. But, a whole sheaf of new approaches will have to come.

It's up to us to be heard on the telephone poles as well as on television, in the supermarket check-out line as well as on the radio. And simply because no one else has bothered to penetrate this "market" does not absolve—but rather intensifies—our obligation to get there.

OEO has an interest. It can do research, make suggestions and exchange experiences. But it will eventually be the information officer in the local CAA who will, with colleagues around the country, put together the accepted textbook on new and imaginative ways of getting to the neglected audience. Without an exchange of information—without somebody's routine practice becoming someone else's exciting new idea—our problem will suffer from the same neglect that has left it the stepchild of commercial researchers.

Behind everything we do lies a hidden time bomb. The greater the gap between our communication with the routine audience and that which we create for our new audience, the more Americans might understandably say, "the poor don't care."

The concept of Community Action has been built on the opposite premise. But if we fail "to get the word out" to our audience of potential participants as well as the observers whose support we solicit, then we fail. If we fail to close the gap between traditional communication and the people whose problems promoted our existence, then we would but repeat the error of the man who questioned the U.N. because it has "so many people in it who speak foreign languages."

Generally, the mass media—press, radio, TV, magazines—has given an unusual amount of attention to War on Poverty programs. Most Americans, whose understanding and support we so vitally need in every community, are beginning to know what we are about and can be expected to respond accordingly. But that support has to be matched—just as does the success of the initial communications job—by support and involvement of the people served.

Nobody supports something, even for his own good, if he never heard of it.

VISTA Volunteer Herbert Alvarez, 24, works at a small desk in the rear of a narrow storefront neighborhood center on 9th Avenue and West 21st Street in Manhattan. The patched-up walls are adorned with color blowups of attractive women posed in exotic settings in the Dolce Vita style of airline calendars, and with pamphlets and posters, in English and Spanish, about housing and welfare problems, birth control, consumer education, and Medicare. The modest surroundings give no indication of the variety and sophistication of Alvarez' work among the residents of the area.

The sign in the storefront window reads "Chelsea Conservation Project." It is operated by the Hudson Guild Neighborhood House under a contract with the New York Housing and Redevelopment Board, but it provides many other services than those related to housing.

THE ASSASSINS

When volunteers Alvarez, Emory Colter, 22, both of East Harlem, and Bruce McIver, 25, of Great Falls, Montana, were assigned to the guild last August, they were asked to work with a group of troublesome Puerto Rican youths whom nobody else had been able to reach. The teenage boys, once known as the Assassins gang, had reformed under the influence of a local priest but were now reverting to the old ways, terrorizing residents and getting into fights with nearby Italian gangs.

Alvarez, who once belonged to a gang himself, began to work with the 18 youths and their families. He saw them daily and became their friend. The apartment shared by the three VISTAs became a gathering place for the youths. Slowly they were drawn into the work of the conservation project. Alvarez arranged to pay them for contacting tenants, for collating and distributing pamphlets to residents and other chores.

They became interested in the conservation project. They would come into the office in the morning and say "Hey baby, what are we doing today." Some of the boys had no place to stay and no money for food. Alvarez, who had gotten to know the people in the neighborhood, said he used the "resources of

the community" to take care of them. He arranged for the local YMCA to put them up for a while. He worked out a schedule whereby different families along the street would feed the boys each day. But these were stopgap solutions.

NO SKILLS

They needed jobs but they had no skills and they had police records besides. Some of them were illiterate in Spanish and English. Alvarez, who had worked as a booking agent and as a claims adjuster, said he called on every agency and friend he had, on people for whom he had done favors, cajoled and applied pressure, in an effort to get them jobs.

"Give him a break because he wants to work," he would tell them. One by one, he got them jobs. Two returned to Puerto Rico and two went back to school. One dropped out of school again. Alvarez was arranging to send him to a job training camp for dropouts in upstate New York operated by the New York City Youth Board.

Late one night one of the Spanish boys in the club drew a knife on Alvarez and challenged him. Alvarez said, "I don't know if they expected me to react like a social worker and tell them it wasn't nice to fight. They just wouldn't understand that kind of talk." Alvarez told the youth either to use the knife or put it away. When the challenger failed to respond to that, Alvarez said he "knocked him around from 18th Street to 19th Street." None of the others intervened to take the side of the challenger. The boy apologized later for his behavior.

SHOWED THEM HOW

'I caught them at a time when they wanted to change but didn't know how to do it," he said. "I showed them how to do it."

Alvarez, Colter and McIver were the first VISTA Volunteers assigned to the Hudson Guild. Now seven other volunteers are working under the guild in neighborhood development, tutorial programs, and the senior citizens center.

The experience of Alvarez shows that a person who is a product of poverty can be extremely effective as a VISTA Volunteer because he understands the culture of those he seeks to help. Glenn W. Ferguson, director of VISTA, said volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds have shown themselves to be unusually well-equipped to work with the poor. He has expanded the effort to recruit qualified persons in this area. By early April several dozen volunteers with such backgrounds were working with antipoverty agencies in New York, Philadelphia and Richmond, California.

VIOLENT JUNGLE

Most VISTA Volunteers have grown up in comfortable surroundings, have attended college, and have learned about poverty in the classroom. Alvarez was born to Puerto

Rican parents in East Harlem, where teenagers learn early to drink wine, sniff glue, and smoke marijuana.

In this kind of jungle, Alvarez had to sharpen up his wits and start hustling at the age of 10. He became a member of a youth gang, learned to fight and to use the tools of violence. At 14 he was almost picked up while carrying a gun, he said. But the gym director of the local boys club caught him with it, took it away, and when the police caught up with him, he was clean.

"It was the boys club that pulled me away from the trouble," he said. He quit high school before his senior year but earned a high school equivalency during two years in military service.

VISTA HELPED

Alvarez said he learned a great deal from VISTA training at the Columbia School of Social Work. "It taught me a lot about myself and about people who have been to college," he said. He felt he contributed something to the training by helping others to understand poverty better. He found that many middle class trainees had romanticized ideas about poverty and "patronizing" attitudes toward the poor.

He was by no means poor before he entered VISTA. He was making good money as a claims adjuster. In order to succeed at it, he felt he would have to make a career of "conning my own people. And I couldn't do that." It was then he knew that he wanted to enter some kind of social service.

—EDWARD O'HARA

new york
A NATION ITSELF

An Interview with Mitchell Sviridoff Who Discusses the Successes of New Haven and the Challenge of New York

Mitchell Sviridoff, a former trade unionist and onetime official of the Agency for International Development, has managed the War on Poverty in New Haven, Connecticut, since its earliest days in 1962. Under his direction, Community Progress, Inc., New Haven's anti-poverty agency, has constructed one of the broadest and most effective Community Action Programs in the country. He was recently appointed to direct the New York City Human Resource Development Project, an effort to reorganize the city's education, welfare, employment and anti-poverty programs.

Here, Mr. Sviridoff discusses New York, New Haven and the whole War on Poverty. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Q What are the differences between the War on Poverty in New Haven and the one in New York City?

A The major differences between the two programs are the obvious ones of scale. The city of New Haven is about the size of a major neighborhood in New York; you could tuck it away in a corner of Bedford-Stuyvesant. But it is more than scale—New York is a much more complicated city. New York is really a country. It has a budget almost the size of most middle-sized countries of the world. It has a budget, I think, four times the size of New Jersey's. And it's trying to operate like a city. Maybe it has to operate more like a nation; maybe it has to be organized more the way a nation is organized. This is the approach we are taking in this Human Resources Development Project. We are part of an attempt to reorganize the city government so the Mayor will be dealing through twelve administrators instead of 50, 60—or is it 90?—nobody yet has an accurate count.

New York has got to find a way of coordinating the efforts of related departments. Here again, that's what

we are about. Until it does that, the anti-poverty program—even if you double the amount of funding—triple, quadruple it—it will be nothing but a spit in the ocean. The anti-poverty effort here has to be part of a much broader effort. In fact, it has to be part of a broader effort even in the smaller cities. But particularly is this so in New York.

In the various areas where we are working, we are dealing with a budget of $2 billion. New York is spending—when you add up all the local money and federal money—only about $75 million in anti-poverty funds. This gives you some idea of the difference, or if you will, the relative unimportance of the anti-poverty investment, in spite of the fact that New York is already putting up more money for anti-poverty than most cities and has been doing so for some time.

Now, the anti-poverty investment need not be unimportant, and it's not wholly a matter of how much you spend—it's how you spend it. If the anti-poverty money is, as it was originally intended to be, money through which effective community action is organized; if it stimulates programs which give people a greater sense of participation; if it's money which helps integrate or glue together related programs; if it's money through which a city can develop a viable set of goals and a program which has some coherence—then it's a very important one, though in terms of dollars, relatively, it doesn't amount to very much.

Q Is there a chance that the New York program will succeed as dramatically as the one in New Haven?

A Right now, New York has a long way to go before it can think in terms of a New Haven-style success—a long way to go.

Q Do you believe that the umbrella concept of a single Community Action agency coordinating the poverty program in any given community can work in a city the size of New York or Los Angeles, or the other large cities?

A To get back to the point I made earlier, if New York is looked upon as a nation and not a city, it can work. But that means what you probably have to do in a city like New York or Los Angeles is to create a number of umbrellas, perhaps one for every major neighborhood. This is one thing we are exploring now. Perhaps every major neighborhood ought to have an umbrella of its own and the central operation ought to relate to the 15 or 20 umbrella organizations around the city as OEO now relates to a city's Community Action agency.

I think that New York is so large you have to find a way to achieve effective de-centralization of responsibility. This is true not only in anti-poverty, but it's true in education, it's true in welfare, it's true in every phase of city life.

Q What is special or unique about the role of a Community Action director, compared with that of other local officials—mayors, health and welfare officers?

A Well, first of all, the rules haven't been written yet in this game; they're still being improvised. Secondly, though a mayor has to confront an election every two or four years, a CAP director, as things are presently constituted, operates almost from month to month. Funding has been on a short term, sporadic basis. The national rules are often developed after the Community Action agency has already developed its rules and style of organization and procedure.

He has the most difficult job, next to the mayor of the city. There is still a great deal of experimentation and innovation required in any Community Action Program, and so he must, of necessity, know how to handle failure as well as success.

He is right smack in the middle of the major revolution of our times—the civil rights revolution—with all that that implies. He has to learn to live with crisis almost every day. He has to be as much an artist as administrator.

It's a damn difficult job.

Q In your estimation, how valuable is participation of the poor in Community Action Programs?

A I think it's extremely useful. I don't think this story has been written yet, either; but it's being written right now. There's been a tendency to view participation too much in terms of numbers and rules and regulations, and not enough in terms of the quality of participation.

There's a tendency to think too narrowly about the whole business of board representation. But that's only one way participation can be achieved. Because of what has been almost an obsession—and maybe a necessary obsession in the early days—with board representation, I don't think we've paid enough attention to the quality of participation.

Q What do you think are the lessons to be drawn from Haryou-ACT?

A There are a lot of positive lessons in Haryou. There are a lot of programs going on in Haryou right now of excellent quality. Haryou has succeeded in achieving a degree of participation in that community the likes of which it hasn't known. I think it was successful in cooling off the situation last summer and

even after the summer. That's on the positive side.

On the negative side, the Haryou experience suggests that it's unrealistic to pour large sums of money into a situation where the capability for administering large sums of money has not yet been developed. It is clear we are going to have to spend large sums of money in the Harlems and the Bedford-Stuyvesants across the country; the need for this is obvious. But as we put money into these communities we ought to provide the kind of technical assistance to help develop the needed capability. Haryou has been in many ways unfairly blamed for their difficulties. They have to share, of course, in some of the blame; but it's not all their fault.

Q New York's Anti-Poverty Operations Board is one of the 15 public bodies in the United States which has the power of concurrent approval of Community Action projects since it furnishes the ten percent local funds. Do you think that's an asset or a liability?

A The present structure in New York is a definite liability but that has nothing to do with the question of veto. The liability as far as the New York structure is concerned is that it's too confusing: there are too many over-lapping layers of responsibility here. Nobody really comprehends; I think that's the chief problem.

I don't know why there has been so much fuss about the city veto. Whether there is a formal veto or not, the fact is that cities are called upon to put up ten percent of the money. What happens if the city doesn't put up its ten percent? Doesn't that amount to a veto?

I have serious doubts that a city can succeed unless there is significant participation by the city as well as by the poor. I feel that Sargent Shriver is quite correct in saying that a Community Action Program takes an integrated, cooperative, well-coordinated effort among all the interests in the community—the people, the city government and the private sector.

Q The Ford Foundation grant to New Haven provided a great impetus for the city's anti-poverty program. Now that the Federal Government is financing much of the local anti-poverty work in the country, what do you think the role of the foundations should be?

A The Ford Foundation is very conscious of the need to start breaking some new ground. The most important area in which they could work right now would be training —training of city-wide and neighborhood-based leaders as well as technicians, not just for the poverty programs, but for all the Great Society programs that are either on the drawing boards or have already been initiated. This is especially important with the Demonstration Cities program coming on.

One of the biggest problems we face in this country today, as far as anti-poverty is concerned, is a lack of capability at the local level to organize, to run anti-poverty programs and to relate them in a sensible way to other local efforts.

The foundations should be considering some experiments in other areas—guaranteed income, for example. This seems to me to be an extremely important new area for exploration and experimentation. We are on the threshhold of some important changes in our welfare concepts, just as we were ten years ago in terms of the relationship of Social Security to medical care. The foundations—not just the Ford Foundation but all foundations, should be out front on this one—breaking the ground, taking the risks the Federal Government can't afford to take.

Another very critical area still with us despite what we've been doing in the way of federal legislation is the whole problem of education in the inner-city. There's been a great deal of money invested here but the pay-off still isn't there. Foundations ought to be ready to try some bold new approaches here.

Q The financing of a Community Action Program now includes 90 percent federal funds and a ten percent local share. Is it realistic to believe that we can eventually move to a formula of 50 percent local funds and 50 percent federal?

A I don't think you can answer that question unless you can predict what the pattern of taxation is going to be in this country in the next five years. What will the Federal Government do about bloc grants to the states and cities, for example? Is that a realistic possibility? If it is, of course it's reasonable to expect some substantial changes in the 90-10 formula.

The cities are terribly hard-pressed; I don't think we can expect much more out of that source. But if reapportionment at the state level reflects itself in some basic changes in state policy—that is, more help to the cities—that surely will make a difference.

If there are no changes in the basic pattern of taxation in terms of federal-state-local relations, I think a 50-50 split is terribly ambitious. I don't think it can be achieved.

Q Do you think the New Haven poverty program has become bureaucratized? Is that a danger for Community Action Programs?

A No. CPI is administering grants of between $6 million and $8 million a year. We have 70 separate programs which must be integrated with 19 separate sources of funds —none of which is guaranteed for a long period of time. You cannot operate a Community Action Program of this scale and complexity without a bureaucracy, but a bureaucracy in the best sense of the word. To try to operate without an efficient bureaucracy would be to invite chaos.

The New Haven program has a high measure of vitality. New Haven continues to take on new experiments. There are more experiments and demonstrations going on in New Haven right now, on a per capita basis, than you'll find anywhere in the country.

Community Action Programs must find ways of combining efficiency, vitality and imaginative programming.

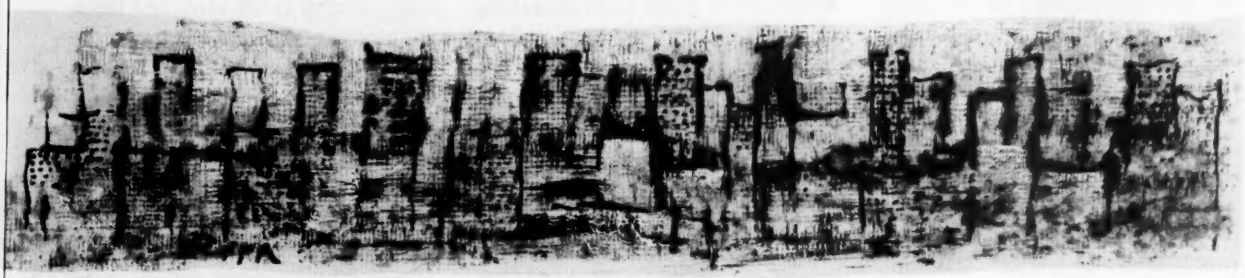
Q The New Haven urban renewal program and the anti-poverty program work together. How do you manage to coordinate physical renewal and social renewal?

A There are many ways in which this is done. Our neighborhood services and social services programs are linked to "opportunity programs." We don't offer services — neighborhood services, social services—in a vacuum. They are not ends in themselves; they are related to all types of opportunities. When families are preparing to move to better housing, it is our responsibility to see whether they understand what is happening before it happens, so that they can deal with whatever problems result from this dislocation. Thus, the transition from slum housing to better housing is more than a physical transition. In many cases it represents a drastic change in the entire lives of people. It reflects itself in families being drawn into a range of opportunity programs—employment education, leisure-time and many others.

Through Community Action programs, we are involved in neighborhood organizations. It is our responsibility to see that neighborhood organizations are strong and effective and that their voices are heard when a neighborhood is being renewed or rehabilitated.

The schools, too, are an integral part of the renewal program in New Haven. Many neighborhood programs are built around the "community school" concept. The community school serves its whole neighborhood—adults as well as children—with recreational, cultural and other leisure-time programs, both during the day and in the evening.

The coordination of physical and social renewal is assured by a mayor who played the major role in iniating, and has consistently put the full weight of his office behind both programs.



Q Do you think physical and social renewal are possible in New York?

A If I didn't think so, I wouldn't be here. They're possible but they are going to be very difficult to achieve. New York starts with one great advantage—a mayor who, like New Haven's mayor, deeply believes in the urgent necessity of far-ranging physical and social renewal programs.

Economic Development in Rural North Carolina

Strangers to New Bern, North Carolina, and surrounding Craven County soon learn that they are in a territory with a tradition. Settled in 1710, New Bern is the second oldest town in the state. It was here that the lord proprietors of the founding Swiss and Germans met when they governed the region and it was here that the first permanent capitol of North Carolina was built. Protected in the Y formed by the Neuse and Trent rivers as they meet to go 40 miles to the ocean, New Bern grew into an active trading town prior to the American Revolution. As a energetic seaport, it combined the exchanging of goods with the West Indies with the building of ships, growing of cotton and the maintaining of an aloof aristocracy.

TIMES CHANGED

But times began to change. Other seaports grew up and New Bern's refined gentlemen retreated into the arms of King Cotton.

The area's days of glory were soon to end. With rapid succession King Cotton was dethroned there and tobacco, the next to reign, became a scorner of small growers.

Craven County's main product now is poor people. One-third of the population of 59,000 lives on income below the poverty line. Of the farmers, 60 percent are white with an average yearly income of $3,500. The rest are Negroes who earn an average of approximately $1,500 per year.

The problems multiply with inadequate housing both in town and on the meager plots of land, with illiteracy of the poor, with unemployment in New Bern and with racial prejudice, evidenced subtlely by individuals and more overtly by the local Ku Klux Klan.

STRENGTH RETURNING

Like a cycle coming full-turn, however, strong and determined people are again appearing. There are people like the public official who rallied his family for an impromptu marshmellow roast when he found a Klan cross burning in his yard, and there are people who are tackling poverty in dynamic ways.

Perhaps their most imaginative and hope-laden attack is the growing of a new crop—strawberries.

For years the Agricultural Extension Service and a county agricultural panel of representatives of different agencies have looked for the right crop to prosper in the Craven County fields. They think they have found that crop in strawberries, and, in an assertive switch, the people of the farms are turning their backs on tobacco to plant this delicious, appealing fruit.

Mrs. Clyde Collins, a middle-aged Negro woman, explains, "I've been a farmer all my life. I love the farm, and I love farming but I hope to turn in on that tobacco. Strawberries is about a third as much work, and they don't cost so much to grow. We've got some corn and some soybeans and a few vegetables but we're hoping about these strawberries and what they're gonna do."

"What they're gonna do" may double the Collinses income from their 22 acre farm. In 1964 that income was $2,200 for Clyde, his wife Maggie and six children.

10,000 PINTS

By late April the Collinses will have one acre of second-year strawberry plants ready for their first harvest. If those plants produce in the North Carolina climate and soil the way the Agricultural Extension Service says they should, the Collinses will be picking between 8,000 and 10,000 pints of berries from their one acre. Those pints, sold at the average price for berries for last year, will bring an income to the Collinses of between $2,400 and $3,000.

Clyde Collins and his wife are members of the Neuse-Trent Diversified Marketing Cooperative, a component program of Craven Operation Progress, Inc., the strong, encompassing Community Action Program operating from New Bern. Director of the CAP program is Robert Monte, 45, who moved to New Bern in 1952.

"PRIVY" PROJECT

Besides the strawberry marketing program, this community effort includes as components a Neighborhood Youth Corps, three day-care centers, a credit union, a sanitation "privy" project, manpower training, adult education classes and a home management training program.

Manager for the strawberry project is R. C. Nobles, a native of North Carolina who received his BS in agriculture in 1927 from the University of North Carolina. It was Nobles, a respected field man with years of experience in agriculture, who undertook to tell the low-income farmers—Negro and white—of the benefits of forming a cooperative to plant strawberries.

UNDER A WAR ON POVERTY PROGRAM

The resulting cooperative has a board of directors of three Negro members and three white members. Two-thirds of its membership is from below the poverty line. The group operates on a $56,000 rural co-op loan and individual loans provided by the Farmers Home Administration.

Only a few of the cooperative members will be selling strawberries this year. It is the group's trial run as only six of the 54 acres of strawberries now in the ground will be producing a second-year crop. First-year strawberry crops are of limited amount and mediocre quality.

TECHNICAL ADVICE

But this has been a time for the cooperative members to learn about growing their new "weapon against poverty." Manager Nobles has spent

long hours explaining to all that strawberry rows should be planted three feet part, that irrigation equipment is needed to supply moisture and to give a quick insulating coat of ice if a deep frost threatens the fruit, that strawberries must be fumigated against the microscopic-size red spiders.

This year's berries, as next year's 100 or more acres of fruit, will be brought to a central warehouse in New Bern. From there they will be loaded onto trucks to go to market where they will be bought by American Foods, distributors from Florida to Maine.

MOTHER OF 15

Among the growers whose strawberries will go to market this year is Lula Laughinghouse, mother of 15 children and sole support for the children at home. Lula is a cautious person, as are the majority of the cooperative members.

"I have to work to get anything. Some people don't, you know. They have luck but I'm one of those people who has to work for everything she gets. We should be picking berries by the middle of April. Maybe if things go the way Mr. Nobles say, well . . . at least I know already that growing strawberries isn't as expensive as growing tobacco."

R. C. Nobles is an optimistic man for all of his worry as the critical picking time approaches. "Why, you know, if everything goes right for the Early Bell strawberries, that's if everything is optimal, the possibilities are 20,000 pints to the acre. . . . Then, you know, these people could have things a little better. If the people like the Collinses could just manage to get things trimmed up there where they live, and if they had a little money. . . . That'd make me happy, don't you know."

— PATRICIA S. SMITH

"nobody wants welfare!"

A Profile of Newark's Blazer Training Program

Walter Dawkins

Walter C. Dawkins, a young grass-roots organizer of the poor, hates public welfare hand-outs as much as any arch conservative. His program to get people off relief into steady jobs should be good news to tax-payers.

Dawkins, 31, is founder-director of Newark's Blazer Work Training Project, an experiment in poverty that takes people directly from the welfare rolls — people previously considered "unemployable" — and trains them quickly to get jobs that will hold firm despite increased automation.

Blazer is a part of Newark's growing catalogue of weapons in the war against poverty and is financed by the Office Of Econmic Opportunity. The first 200 students have begun classes. Local sociologists are hopeful Blazer will help people at the bottom of the economic barrel move toward meaningful work and life styles.

The Blazer Project is nationally significant for two very compelling reasons:

- It has the potential to slash public welfare expenditures;
- It is a program conceived, organized and administered by the poor themselves.

Both premises make it a program to be studied closely by Community Action agencies throughout the states and territories.

"WILD MAN"

Walter Dawkins, a wiry, energetic young man, is the spirit of Blazer. Critics call him the "wild man of poverty." His champions consider him a metropolitan St. George slaying dragons of apathy which lurk along the trail of the front lines of the poverty war.

A former school-teacher and social worker, Dawkins knows first hand of the denigrating effect of public welfare on people who want to lift themselves into the mainstream of American affluence. He frankly recalls being a "welfare baby" himself in his hometown of East St. Louis, Illinois.

"My mother was a recipient of welfare," he recalled, "As my father died when I was two years old." Mrs. Dawkins, a woman of spirit, determined to kick the public assistance pattern as soon as she could. By the time Dawkins entered elementary school he and his brothers were free and clear of it although he was a witness to what welfare did to other families much of his life thereafter.

"My hometown has always been a slum area," he said. "It was compared with Chicago and often called "Little Chicago." I was a part of all the street fights, the gangs, the athletic teams and the successes and failures of the academic system along with all the other guys.

"I lived in the East End, called Polack Town, a section akin to Harlem in New York. Everything went in Polack Town. We lived in a building called 'The Brick,' one long building two stories high with 20 families of poor people."

LIKE ZOMBIES

Dawkins remembers with a trace of bitterness that many of his neighbors lived from welfare check to welfare check but seethed with a quiet rage all the while because "nobody wants welfare, not really, it's like being a zombie, you just sit and wait for transfusions in shape of a check in the mail."

The welfare check, Dawkins grew up recognizing, was simply a way of keeping the brakes on people, a form of social control, an emasculation of spirit, a confession of the community's failure to meet its responsibility to the more disadvantaged of its members.

"When we designed the Blazer Work Training program," he said, "We kept in mind that there is a hard kernel of pride and a need for self-respect in even the most economically-deprived people. Blazer is working to reach that spirit in poor people, to break through their surface apathy and help them help themselves get moving."

* * * *

Prior to the Blazer Work Program, initiated last fall, Dawkins had operated a volunteer agency (the Blazer Youth Council) that worked to rehabilitate members of Newark's toughest teen-age crime gangs.

When his volunteer agency presented the Work Training Project to city and federal governments, Dawkins found that while OEO was ready to get the idea launched immediately, he felt the city was dragging its feet on coming up with funds to match the OEO grant.

Rather than wait for red tape to unsnarl, Dawkins with characteristic zest, rallied his friends, associates (including some of those same tough teens from the Blazer Youth Council) and hit the sidewalks of Newark on a fund-raising campaign.

Blazer volunteers went into pool rooms, saloons, set up shop on poverty area street corners, were everywhere in fact. In short order, they raised the necessary money and the Blazer Work Training Project was ready to begin.

"The War on Poverty is too crucial to this society's survival for us to wait around," Dawkins said of his crash collection. "We just took our program to the people of Newark and they came up with the money."

COMMON TOUCH

This sense of purpose and urgency that Dawkins inspires confounds a lot of people in Newark used to more conventional approaches. It also has caused several collisions between Dawkins and an assorted host of enemies. But even his most adamant foes grudingly admit that Walter is a genuine grass-roots leader. "Oh Walter has the common touch all right," a former Blazer Council member has commented. "He is one of the few intellectuals in the country, perhaps, who can completely relate to the poor. He is at home in a gospel church or a teen-age rock and roll record hop or a slum tavern, and he can get people to move . . . without them feeling he's ever talking down to them. He can motivate people that traditional social workers can never communicate with . . . the only thing is he is so keen on his work sometimes he leaves others with the feeling he has a patent on poor people and no one else has his expertise."

A friend explains Dawkins' drive this way: "His whole life these last five years has been Blazer, first with helping delinquents and now with training folks to get jobs. Most of this time he has worked without money—don't ask me how he kept above water—but now that his dream is reality, he takes a stark view of the world. With him, either you are a friend of Blazer or an enemy. Walter doesn't feel he has time to make subtle distinctions."

For a time a will-struggle of classic proportions seemed to be shaping up between an impatient Dawkins and cautious officials of the United Community Corporations, Newark's central anti-poverty agency. UCC had the responsibility for seeing that Blazer met all administrative procedures required under the Economic Opportunity Act.

BLAZER PROGRAM is based on vocational training in trades such as upholstery that automation will not affect. Former welfare recipients welcome opportunity to prove themselves employable.

One UCC staffer who worked closely with Blazer during its founding, after a set-to with Walter in January, reported wearily: "We have no doubt Dawkins is a brilliant program planner, it is a case of his seeing our view as we are trying to see his. I keep suggesting that he leave the administrative details to us so he will be free to direct the program but he hangs right in there with us." For a time, it seemed even an innocous item such as hand soap for the lavatories might have touched on a crisis had Dawkins decided liquid soap better met the needs of the poor.

STUDENT UNITY

This was the same week Dawkins had led his new student body through a Blazer assembly meeting which ended with the students voting half of the program's executive committee out of office. It was a wild, exhilarating session which shook local Community Action leaders into an all-day series of meetings on what to do with Dawkins but ended with the students, all hard-core unemployables, unified, proud and determined to make Blazer a success.

"This was the first time in their lives," Dawkins said afterward, "that many of these people had ever taken a stand or participated in a democratic meeting, and actually saw that their vote could count."

The issue on which Dawkins brought his new students together was fundamental to his concept of motivating the poor. "Some of our Council members were middle-class, cautious; and the students sensed they would take forever to get the project moving. Remember these students are at a do-or-die point in their lives. If they don't get training for jobs through Blazer they know it's the end of the line for them. They want to make good, it's their last chance. So what happened was they voted out the slow pokes."

These initial, perhaps necessary skirmishes, have lost their steam. The Blazer Project is settled in its workshop building in Central Newark and the program is moving.

Just how is Blazer structured?

Dawkins explains it this way: "The Blazer Coordinating Council Of Youth Development is a non-profit corporation composed of three distinct bodies: an executive committee which is an advisory group to the trustees and their membership. A trustee board and the third body, the general membership comprised of people from the Newark community at large interested in this city's poor.

"This is the parent body which created a work-training project for a student body of 200 persons from the rolls of city welfare. These students, all adults, are being trained in four basic areas, upholstery, floor polishing and surfacing, automotive repair and food preparation.

"Each of these four training areas is further subdivided. This means simply that upholstery for example has in it furniture upholstery, slip covers and drapes. And so on. For each trade.

SURVEYED JOBS

To determine what kinds of vocational training would most quickly provide jobs for Blazer students, the Blazer staff, Dawkins said "went to the Area Redevelopment Corporation in the city of Newark and checked their statistical data on jobs openings and fields where workers cannot be automated out of jobs,

fields of constant need."

Federal and state job projection data was also studied. Dawkins is keenly aware of the implications of automation and feels that in training people for jobs that "will hold up at least into the nineteen-seventies, is as far as anyone in vocational education dare go."

The Blazer workers then checked their job data with local industries and the final four-trade curriculum is a result of agreement on jobs are available *by both labor experts and employers.*

Once Dawkins and his staff knew what the labor market was like they tackled the problem of teaching people who had been able to hold steady jobs in the past or had unfortunate schooling experience if any schooling at all.

His own experience as a community organizer had much earlier led him to conclude that most adult training programs for hard-core unemployed people had failed in the past because of what he calls "a national mistake. . . ."

"Right here in the city of Newark," he said, "at a much earlier stage of the anti-poverty program this national mistake was illustrated by the fact that the people who got the money and the facilities to train poor people were always people out of the community, people 'downtown' so to speak.

"When the poor communities looked around it was the same 'downtown' people getting the facilities and then saying to the poor 'come to us, we'll teach you and get you to read.' For the poor it was the same old question of 'those people' again.

NATIONAL MISTAKE

"The mistake really was in not housing the program right within the community where the poor could participate."

Dawkins is very firm in his insistance that traditional social workers and educators have failed miserably in their missions.

"If you're really going to involve the poor on various levels, the communications barriers must be broken down. We felt and saw that this was a part of what the Government was saying when it launched the War on Poverty and traditionally (in education and other social areas) there has been a complete lack of communications. In Newark and elsewhere."

And so Blazer's second concern was a teaching method that would really communicate with poor people, involve and not patronize them at any step of the process.

The answer: assembling a staff of teachers and teacher aides that in the director's words: "were from the poor areas who use the same terminology and had the same broad basic understanding of what poverty really is."

Dawkins' theory that qualified instructors could be found at the grass-roots level was quickly borne out as Blazer under guidelines set down by UCC began screening applicants for teaching jobs.

"For instance, we found a mechanic who had been on the rolls of the welfare for a year but who had something like 20 years experience in automobile repair. When the man came to us as a student he was rescreened by our staff, sent before the personnel committee, and won a job as assistant instructor.

SET AN EXAMPLE

"His educational background might be no more than sixth-grade level but he does have 20 years of experience in a specific field. With a capable instructor above him, he has a real chance to help himself get off relief and stay off and set an example for students, poor like himself.

The Blazer Student Council is the dynamic that Dawkins believes will ensure success of the program and he rates this as importantly as curriculum and qualified instructors.

"You can't just take in 200 people on welfare and say 'all of a sudden we're going to make you employable and give you a job.' That cannot be the scope. If you begin there you are finished from the start.

"The number one thing is to straighten out the student's psychological approach to his problems. That's the purpose of the Blazer Student Council. Through the therapy of meeting with other people he gains a self-inspiration and determination to do for himself, to never go back on the rolls of welfare. When he gets to this point and looks to see how far down he was before beginning classes and participating in the Council, the student begins to go through a thought pro-

cess like this: 'Well there ain't no need for me to be on welfare in the first place, I can do a job, and I don't want to be on welfare in the second, and when this is over I'll never go back."

By giving students a say in their destinies through the Council, it is Dawkins' theory, self-esteem is raised to the necessary level where "when you place him on a job, his chances of staying are 80 per cent greater than if you just train him. . . ."

NEXT CRISIS

The Blazer School has been operational three months now. The real test of the concept, Dawkins realizes, comes when the first wave of students are placed on jobs.

Will some students fall into past patterns of ineffectiveness? Absenteeism, drinking, and other syndromes of unemployables?

"You can't end it with students once they get jobs," was his answer. "Your program must include a well-thought-out follow-up. Again the Blazer Council is most important. When a student leaves school his Council membership continues. He is expected to come back to membership meetings, to donate money to the matching funds and counsel other students who will follow his same training path.

"This is a vital and healthy relationship. The graduate student, often for the first time in his life, has a measure of progress to be proud of. This pride developed through Blazer keeps him on the job and he returns to show the membership his self-sufficiency. 'Look, I ain't off the job and I ain't back on the rolls of welfare, I'm doing what you really set out to help me do.' "

OPEN DOOR POLICY

To that end the Blazer staff works long hours, after classes counseling students with problems of home and family that would affect the quality of their classwork unless resolved. Dawkins and instructors are quick to note any sign of faltering by any student and an open door policy is in force with all professionals on staff.

"We want every student to feel sure that any time anything bugs him we are here to listen, advise and act."

As a case in point, Dawkins told of a student, father of a teen-age boy, who was obviously troubled.

"He came to me. I didn't go to him. That's one of our fundamentals that students' problems don't go unheard. Once they find out you mean business they bring all kinds of problems, from soup to nuts.

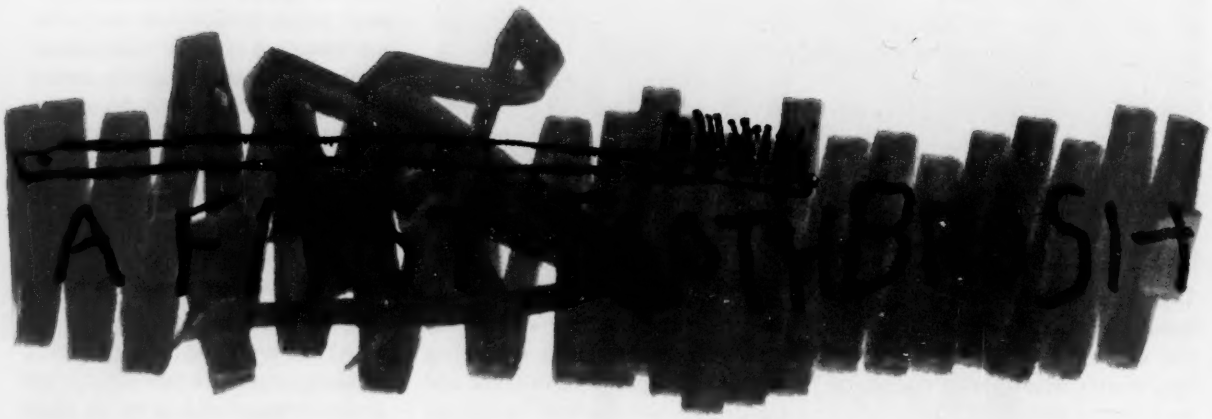
"Anyway this man suspected his boy was on narcotics or getting close to it . So we immediately moved to act. We talked him into night school, but he's go to do something during the day and he should be in the Neighborhood Youth Corps or some local training component which is what we are trying to crash through by tomorrow."

It is this concern for each student, finally, that is the foundation Blazer hopes to build from.

Dawkins, unruffled, as enthusiastic as ever, envisions a time when other communities would want to share the knowledge and approaches now being shaped in Blazer, Newark.

"It is the hope and scope of the Blazer program that it might become a national training academy of the poor. I'd hope that some of the staff members who made this program go, after we give the government a chance to look at it and see where it works or fails in various areas, would go to other communities to help set up similar programs."

—RALPH MATTHEWS, JR.



Head Start
in Tennessee

For some of the five and six year olds from low-income families in the rural highlands of Claiborne County, Tennessee Operation Head Start has meant a first tooth-brush.

For others; a first hair shampoo.

Little things, possibly, but new and wondrous to these shy progeny of proud mountain people for whom time, too often, has stood still, of people in clap-trap cabins in hills off the highways that snake through the beginning mountains of Appalachia.

Plumbing is a marvel for some of these folks and their worlds are so circumscribed by the crippling legacy of poverty that until Operation Head Start was launched in Claiborne, many of the children had seen no more than their half-acre of homestead, no further knowledge of the world outside than can be seen down a stretch of lonely dirt road.

WILD GIRL

A land where the Head Start teachers went out to find the impoverished hill families and encountered such scenes as:

A little girl, wild, ragged, in the back door of a shanty.

"Will it be all right if we sign your daughter up for this new class, ma'am?" The Head Start recruiter asks the question softly.

The mountain mother says: "If you can catch her, you can take her."

The little girl, wild, possessed by some demons of red clay country, tears out the back door into the rocky meadow.

"Well, we just on and caught her," says a Head Start lady.

"Now she's just a darling, after being in class and around others. She's learning about modern life, the wildness is waning."

Or little Verlen. Proud son of a

proud father. An infant example of the rugged individualism deep in the bones of folks in this slice of Americana.

"Why Verlen just decided right off pre-school wasn't for him so he just backed off from the principal, scooped up some mud from the road and let it fly."

Verlen, his Head Start teacher was soon to observe was "exceedingly bright" but "he'll always be a challenge to his teachers."

LIFTING THEM UP

The important thing, Head Start staffers feel, is that the program has enabled them to go and pluck these children out of the hills, and through pre-school enrichment classes, bring them up to the experiential level of children from more advantaged backgrounds.

Mrs. Emma Jo Hurst, Child Development officer for Claiborne County, and a guiding force in the Head Start Operation there knows the territory like the palm of her hand and can see the individual triumphs wrought by this anti-poverty pre-school project.

"The first day, one little girl walked around the classroom and touched everything. Even something as commonplace as a doorknob was a novelty. Running water fascinated her.

"At first her teachers felt the child was retarded but has since found her one of the brightest in class.

"This child has lived in a wrecked school bus most of her life. There are two other children. This is the second family for the father and they all live inside the bus. But the

SHY, WITHDRAWN mountain boy is brought out of his shell by Head Start classes in Lone Mountain, Tenn.

little girl has hope. She's come a long way. She is very proud of her new manners. 'I say please to Mommy every day' she told her teacher, 'I can say please pass the taters.' "

MADE HIM SICK

Mrs. Hurst recalled a boy, one of four children, from a remote farm. The modern facilities of Tazewell's Head Start classes in the First Baptist Church's community center and the departure from his isolated environment so un-nerved him "he was sick to his stomach."

The teacher gave him an orange and took him home. On the way she suspected that more than nervousness might be affecting him.

"What did you have for breakfast?"

His mother answered: "Black coffee."

Now Head Start staffers see that he gets something to eat as soon as he gets to school. Once able to see his home, it was apparent to them that breakfast was often a luxury this family (and others) simply could not afford.

SUCCESS, NOT FAILURE

Miss Lucy Courtney, regional Head Start training officer for the Tennessee Office Of Economic Opportunity, cited five ways poor youngsters in Claiborne have been helped by the program.

"In the eight weeks training since Claiborne's Head Start was funded for 1966, we have seen timid rural children drawn out of their shells, they've learned to communicate with others much better, their self-images are improved because we work to see that a climate of praise surrounds each child, eating habits are improved and most importantly, Operation Head Start is teaching them to succeed rather than fail."

—R. M. JR.

833 BUSHELS OF CONIFEROUS SEEDS

Young men receiving basic education and work skill training in Job Corps Conservation Centers around the country are helping to protect and improve the nation's parks, forests and grasslands. The Corpsmen spend approximately half their time in conservation work and half in education. They have logged an impressive record in the first 13 months of the Job Corps program in forest fire control and prevention, timber and wildlife management, recreation and administrative facilities improvement, and erosion control.

The work being done by Corpsmen includes the restoration of historical sites, construction of facilities for the vacationing public, and the preservation of the nation's natural resources.

This work is providing the young men with constructive skills in the use of hand and power tools and is providing a substantial contribution to the nation.

There are 81 Conservation Centers in 33 states and Puerto Rico now in operation, with approximately 9300 young men 16 through 21 in training.

A summary of the Job Corps Conservation Centers work performance from February 1965 through February 1966 offers impressive statistics:

FOREST PROTECTION

Corpsmen spent 25,752 man-hours fighting forest fires on 19,015 acres and constructed 76 miles of fire breaks. They cleared 128 miles of roadsides and 7,651 acres to prevent fires. Corpsmen helped treat 4,134 acres of trees and plants to control disease, 90 acres of trees to control insect pests, and 70 acres to preserve trees.

FOREST CULTURE

Corpsmen helped plant 13 experimental forest plots, 943 acres of tree planting and seeding, and improved 2,258 acres of forest stand. The young men collected 883 bushels of coniferous seeds and 687 pounds of hardwood trees seeds for future planting. The Corpsmen estimated timber on 1,368 acres.

LANDSCAPING, RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Job Corpsmen improved 52 acres of beach, cleared 2,266 acres, landscaped 1,289 acres, planted 4,132 trees and shrubs and seeded or sodded 410 acres, prepared 30,963 square yards of parking areas and overlooks, developed 519 acres of public campgrounds and picnic

areas, and laid 11,622 yards of walks of all kinds. Corpsmen razed 43 undesirable structures, removed 110 acres of trees in their beautification work, terraced 404 miles of slopes.

STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS

Corpsmen helped construct 13 foot and horse bridges and 12 vehicle bridges; 423 barracks and bunkhouses, 14 cabins, 435 equipment and supply storehouses, 2,293 service and repair shops, 8 shelters, 3 lookout towers, 1 visitors' center, 33 garages, and 662 other types of structures. They restored 8 historical structures.

They constructed water storage facilities with a capacity of 143,305 gallons, waste disposal systems to accommodate more than 800,000 gallons, sanitary facilities in 78 locations and 11 incinerators. They built 2,107 cubic yards of cribbing and filling and 26,451 cubic yards of levees and dikes.

Corpsmen built 485 miles of fences and 356 miles of guard rails, helped install 8 miles of power lines and 54 miles of telephone lines, laid 11,050 yards of pipe or tile lines, and dug 3,940 yards of open ditches. They built 8 drinking fountains, 7 small reservoirs, 17 springs, 4 water holes and 27 wells. They constructed 479 stoves and fire places, 200 seats and benches, 748 tables and bench combinations, and 149 trash collection stations.

They built 1,398 yards of stone walls, erected 913 signs, markers and monuments, and marked 124 miles of boundary lines.

TRANSPORTATION

Corpsmen built 2 landing docks and 1 helispot. They helped build 602 miles of truck trails and minor roads, and 480 miles of foot trails.

EROSION CONTROL

Corpsmen built 5 permanent and 69 temporary check dams and completed 10,874 square yards of bank sloping and 1,594 square yards of stream and lake bank protection. They seeded and sodded 819 acres to prevent erosion and built 1,033 yards of diversion ditches and 3,105 yards of stream channel.

WATER CONTROL, IRRIGATION, DRAINAGE

Corpsmen cleaned 38 acres of lake and pond sites, excavated 12,505 cubic yards of earth and 2,389 cubic yards of rock, laid 5,735 yards of pipe, tile or conduit in ditches, placed 3,604 square yards of rock and concrete rip-rapping, and constructed 55 water control structures and 3 impounding or diversion dams.

WILD LIFE IMPROVEMENTS

The young men built 12 cattle guards and 6 corrals, killed poisonous weeds on 774 acres, planted vegetation on 115 acres of range land, developed 11 miles of stream for wildlife, built 18 stock watering tanks and 216 wildlife shelters.

The Detroit Experiment
Precedents for the Poor

"I found myself in poor circumstances legally, a few weeks ago," a Detroit woman wrote to the University of Detroit Law School. "In a situation that caused quite a bit of anxiety to me. I had no money to retain an attorney. . . . I am separated and the soul support of my five children. A friend referred me to Urban Law and an appointment was made.

"Paul J. Dietz; after asking me the preliminary questions required; heard me and accepted my case. At this time I was notified that a warrant was being issued against me. If Mr. Dietz had not interceded; the issuing of a warrant in itself would have placed my job in jeopardy and if I had been found guilty—the consequences would have been disastrous to my family and myself. . . .

"I must especially commend Mr. Dietz for his sincerity and his efforts in my behalf. His counsel, literally, saved my life.

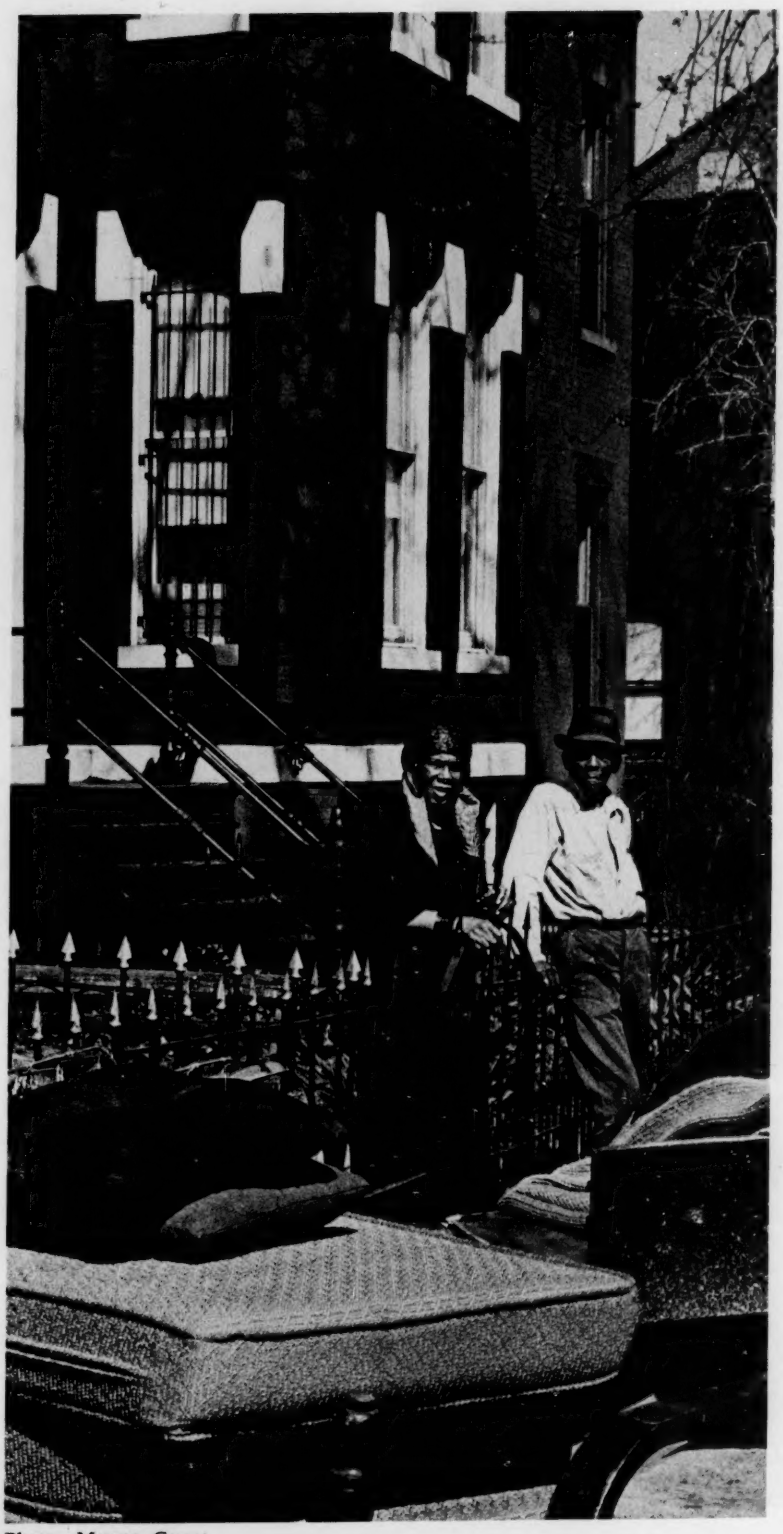
"I cannot adequately express how deeply I appreciate each of you; Mr. Dietz; staff of U. of D. Law School and the U.S. Government."

At a time of evident despair, the woman had turned to the University of Detroit's Urban Law Program, a War on Poverty experiment in law for the poor. Her case—like more than 635 that have been handled in the last six months—was pursued by the staff of a special law clinic, a storefront firm which is serving indigent clients while also providing unique training for law students, training in understanding the legal problems of the poor.

The Urban Law Program—awarded a $240,000 Community Action grant in September—includes four broad areas of legal concern which make it one of the most comprehensive Legal Services projects in the country.

A curriculum program is developing model revisions of the law school curriculum which will provide increased instruction in the needs of indigent clients, offering new courses on welfare law, landlord and tenant problems, employee rights and juvenile cases.

A community education program, directed toward low-income areas



Photo—MARTIN CARP

of Detroit, is teaching the poor their rights and obligations under the law, using law students as instructors.

A research program will study the problems of urban law and the legal system as it affects the poor, looking to the drafting of new legislation and the evolution of new legal remedies which will increase the chances of the poor obtaining "equal justice under law."

And the clinical training program, operated through an Urban Law Office, is giving law students the opportunity to deal directly with the problems of the poor. Working under the supervision of able lawyers, the students are actually representing clients who could not afford attorneys, and winning cases. Only one in forty of the court cases handled by the office have been unsuccessful.

"The legal profession and its law schools," states an outline of the Detroit program, "have by and large devoted their attention and energies to the needs of private clients.

Lawyers have been concerned with practice in a world of private business transactions and the law schools have mirrored the demands that this orientation has created in terms of curriculum and training. The heavy emphasis in law school courses on corporate law, taxation, property, trusts, creditor's rights, and estate planning is merely responsive to the realities of legal practice as it has existed. Law school curriculums are aimed principally at the concerns of clients with property and thus fail to give a full view of the legal system."

The Detroit experiment, not yet beyond its earliest stages, is already establishing precedents in the other direction: training lawyers who will counsel the poor with understanding and experience.

Photo—Bruce Roberts

Waging The War

OPERATION MEDICARE ALERT, the Community Action project which hired older persons to inform the residents of poor rural neighborhoods of their new Medicare opportunities, will continue to operate in areas where it is needed, now that Congress has extended the deadline for Medicare registration to May 31st.

On the original deadline of March 31st—the day when persons over 65 had to sign up for the voluntary medical insurance which covers most doctors' bills—an estimated 17 million of the 19 million eligible participants had already registered with Social Security offices. Some 14,500 Medicare Alert workers in more than 460 communities throughout the country helped reach these older citizens, explaining the new benefits and aiding them in getting to the registration places. Sometimes that was not so easy—in Greene County, Ohio, a 98-year-old man told his Medicare Alert representative, "The government has made me wait often enough. Now it's my chance to make you wait."

Photo—BRUCE ROBERTS

HABBID VS. EDWARDS, a case now pending before the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, may offer a significant precedent in landlord-tenant cases, an area of the law with dramatic meaning for the poor. Represented by lawyers from the Legal Services arm of Washington's anti-poverty program, a woman who lives as a month-to-month tenant is contesting an eviction which came shortly after she complained to government officials of unlawful sanitary conditions on her landlord's property.

Her defense rests on the argument that her eviction was a retaliatory measure which violates her constitutional rights. In the trial court, two judges considered the issue and each reached different conclusions. The first held that the tenant "has a constitutional right to inform the proper governmental authorities of violations of the law, as well as the correlative right not to be injured or punished by anyone for having availed herself of her basic right to provide such information. . . ."

In a second hearing, another judge sustained objections to admission of evidence on the retaliation issue and directed a verdict for the landlord.

If that ruling is reversed by the present appeal, the law will have provided a long-needed remedy for poor tenants who suffer unfortunate living conditions without complaint because they fear retaliatory eviction.

CAN HIGH SCHOOL UNDERACHIEVERS who were raised in poverty be motivated by summer sessions of education on college campuses to continue their education? That is the question facing Upward Bound, the pre-college program geared to the needs of young men and women of high potential who have been stunted by the limited experiences offered by the environment of poverty.

The Office of Economic Opportunity will award by the end of this month more than 200 Upward Bound grants. The Community Action funds will finance eight-week residential sessions to be conducted this summer with follow-up programs during the regular school year. Administering the projects are colleges, universities, secondary schools with residential capacities and delegate educational institutions of Community Action agencies.

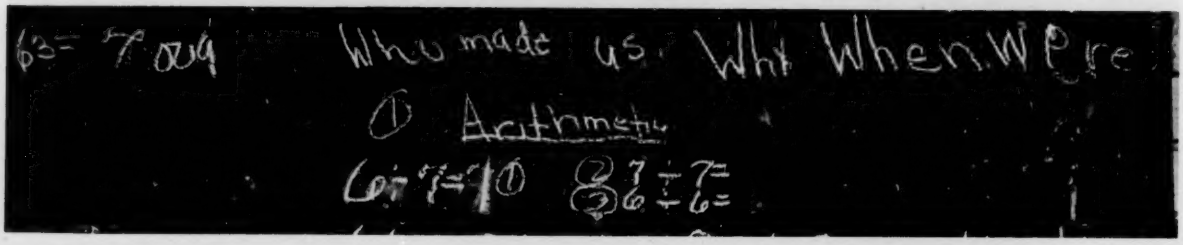
More than 200,000 students—including the youth of migrant families and urban ghettos—will be enrolled in the program. Perhaps they will respond to Upward Bound's motivation as a student-participant in last summer's experimental program did. She wrote to her summer teacher:

"I could have done better work than I did, if I had tried. I didn't want to get to like everybody too much but I did it accidentally. I got to like you a lot so I tried to act like I didn't. . . . I'm determined to go to college no matter what happens. I hope you forgive me for the way I acted."

PROJECT ENABLE, a national demonstration program concerned with the problem of disintegrating families, now has more than 50 projects operating in 22 states. Supervised nationally by the Family Service Association, the Child Study Association and the National Urban League, ENABLE organizes group discussions to examine such topics as money and job problems, child rearing worries and family-school relationships.

The sessions, led by specially trained residents of low-income neighborhoods, are experimenting with group participation as a means of sorting out and solving family problems. The sessions are intended to increase the parents' self-confidence and self-respect, leading to greater family cohesion and increased participation in community efforts.

ENABLE—Education and Neighborhood Action for Better Living Effort—now represents a federal investment of more than $2,975,000.



In next month's issue:

Foster Grandparents;
Moving Mountains
In Appalachia;
Unions and the War

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY